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SUBJECT: RUSSIA IN DENIAL OVER GEORGIA'S CIS EXIT

REF: MOSCOW 2070

¶1. (SBU) Summary: While Moscow officials speculate that Georgia under a new leadership might choose to reapply for CIS membership, analysts take Georgia's departure from that organization as an indication that the CIS only has "symbolic" importance, as former Soviet Union countries increasingly determine their individual "vectors" of development. End Summary.

GOR hopes Georgia will return to the fold

¶2. (SBU) Despite the one-year lead time Moscow had to digest Georgia's departure from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), effective today, authorities are still in denial that Georgia's exit is final. While Deputy Director of the Information and Press Department of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Igor Lyakin-Frolov told Vedomosti newspaper that Georgia as a sovereign country had the right to make decisions about joining or leaving the organization, another unnamed MFA official noted that Georgia remained a signatory of over 70 multilateral treaties with the countries of the CIS. Another MFA official even suggested to Kommersant that a new administration in Georgia would be free to reapply for CIS membership, and promised that such an application "would be considered."

Experts skeptical about the CIS' future

¶3. (SBU) Despite the GOR's sanguinity, experts see Georgia's withdrawal from the CIS as a sign of that organization's failure. Carnegie Center's Alexei Malashenko said that the CIS was an "incapable office," and that its leaders were well aware that the CIS only had symbolic value. Analyst Chelpanova Milan stated that the CIS was losing relevance with each passing day, while Kommersant speculated that Ukraine will be the next country to depart the CIS.

¶4. (SBU) Malashenko went on to say that since Russia's war with Georgia last year, CIS countries were intensifying their search for other partners than Russia. Moscow State University's Alexei Vlasov said the CIS was now undergoing a "divorce," as Soviet-era ties loosened and countries sought to determine their own "vectors" of development. The CIS was now just a "virtual space," possibly to be replaced within 5-7 years by several regional "modules," variously under Russian, Western, and possibly others' control. Vlasov could only imagine a reintegration of the CIS if there were some uniting economic cause; however, he saw none.

¶5. (SBU) Deputy Chairman of Duma Committee on CIS Affairs and Director of the Institute of CIS countries Konstantin Zatulin turned the tables on Georgia, arguing it had joined the CIS as a "Trojan horse," and together with Ukraine prevented the CIS from developing effectively. Therefore, not only was Georgia's withdrawal from the CIS not a tragedy, but the withdrawal forestalled any discussion of Georgia's expulsion. Zatulin added he was convinced that Ukraine

would not leave the CIS.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Georgia's departure from the CIS and rumors that Ukraine might soon follow suit reinforce the impression that Russia's influence in its neighborhood is waning, as Moscow-backed regional organizations such as the CSTO (reftel) or CIS lose members and/or meaning.

RUBIN